

OECD/DAC Chairman Richard Manning's Address to the UNSC, March 2004

Hello, I am Richard Manning. I am the chair of the OECD Development Assistance Committee, but I am also co-chair of PARIS21.

I would like to thank you very much for allowing me to address you at the 35th Session of your Statistical Commission. I'm sorry that I can't be there in person.

With the Millennium Declaration in 2000, the joint statement issued from the Monterrey International Conference on Financing for Development in 2002, and the Marrakech Second International Roundtable for Managing for Development Results in 2004, the demand for development data to feed the national and international statistical systems is accelerating and universal.

It is not to you, the statisticians, that I need to stress that statistical data are essential for the analysis and diagnosis of development and poverty reduction policies, for priority setting and development strategy formulation, for monitoring programme implementation and monitoring progress toward development goals including the Millennium Development Goals, for the evaluation of outcomes and impacts, for feedback to the next policy round, as well as for the effectiveness of donor aid itself.

We have to get better at putting over that statistics are not just a technical issue for statisticians but a crucial policy one as well. They are essential to improve governance and government accountability and transparency. And they're also very important in the future set of policy. Clare Short always used to remind us in London when I was working for the UK Department for International Development of the big statistical surveys done in poor parts of cities in the United Kingdom in the late 19th century, which were extremely powerful in changing the whole set of policy in the United Kingdom. And what went for Britain in the 19th century goes for many countries around the world today.

From the point of view of the international community, there is clearly a growing demand for hard information on results, not just on the Millennium Development Goals, but what I want to stress today is particularly the needs of policymakers and civil society in developing countries themselves. Without good underpinning facts, information, and evidence, it's impossible for these policymakers to set sensible policies and it's impossible for civil society to hold them effectively to account.

In order to respond to this growing demand for data, all countries, along with multilateral and bilateral donor partners, need to ensure the building of statistical capacities, and we think this requires the context of a proper National Strategy for the Development of Statistics.

All too often, I have to say, donors have sent the opposite signal and invested large amounts of money on project-specific M&E systems while ignoring the underlying national systems which countries must develop if they are going to create sustainable overall statistical approaches.

So we think that countries need a statistical development strategy which would provide an overall vision of the development of the national statistical system. This needs to include national, regional, as well as international needs. It needs to be closely linked to the national development and poverty reduction policy. And it needs to serve as a framework which is accepted by the donors for international and bilateral assistance, includes all relevant data production units, addresses the issues related to the analysis and use of data, follows international standards including data quality, and builds on all past and existing activities and experiences.

Initiatives which are very much welcome at sector level, for example the new initiative in health, need to be closely linked into this overall national approach. What we're looking for here is very parallel to the way in which many donors have moved away from many competing, stand-alone projects to putting their weight more behind sector strategies, sector-wide approaches, trying to see the local system as a whole and trying, as I've said already, instead of building lots of project implementation units and activities that respond to donors' requirements to invest much more time and effort in building the recipients' systems and helping

recipients sustain and develop their own approaches to areas such as statistics but also many other areas as well.

I was very pleased to be in Marrakech a few weeks ago for the workshop on Managing for Development Results, which produced among other things an Action Plan for Statistics, which I think is a very useful and very practical framework for further work internationally. Not least because the plan draws on international initiatives and country experience and has some hard-edged and practical proposals within it.

The key points of the plan are six, and they are as follows:

1. *Mainstream strategic planning of statistical systems and help all low-income countries prepare national strategies for the development of statistics by 2006.*
2. *Strengthen preparations for the 2010 census* (which is going to be an absolutely critical building-block for looking at progress toward the Millennium Development Goals but is also going to be essential for developing all sorts of policy approaches at the national level).
3. *Increase financial support for statistical capacity building.*
4. *Set up an international household survey network* (so that we can make the most effective use of this very powerful tool).
5. *Undertake urgent improvements needed for MDG monitoring for 2005* (which is a very important year for accountability in progress toward the Millennium Development Goals as we move towards 2015. As you know, there is going to be a major UN summit in the latter part of 2005, which will be a crucial moment for taking stock of progress since the UN Millennium Assembly in 2000 and the Monterrey Conference in 2002).
6. *Increase the accountability of the international statistical system.*

I think this is a really worthwhile agenda, and I very much hope that it will have the support of the UN Statistical Commission.

Donors have a very important role to play in this. And I would like to see donors more often introducing in their direct policy dialogue with developing countries the need for statistical development. I would like to see them favouring the integration of statistics into the mainstream of overall development policy and proper inclusion in national budgets. But this will only happen if developing countries themselves show that they consider that policy-relevant statistics really matter and if they put some energy behind this in their own dialogue with donors. And the more that donors move toward country-wide systems of support, for example general budget support, the more crucial recipient country views on priorities, including priorities for statistics, are going to be.

So I'd like to urge the Commission and the international community to face the challenge of building and developing national capacities to produce these relevant, good quality, and timely statistical data that are needed by developing countries themselves for the evaluation of their own policies and are also going to be an important building-block to enable us to track progress toward the Millennium Development Goals internationally.

I'd like to stress again the importance of this not just to local policymakers, although I think they're the central clients for this, but also in the climate of accountability and good governance, the importance of better statistics for all, the engagement of civil society, for accountability, for transparency. I think these are all very important objectives that developing countries are striving for, and the role of good statistics and public, transparent, and clean statistics in that is extremely important.

So I'd like to once again thank you in the UN Statistical Commission and my colleagues here in PARIS21 for organising this presentation. Thank you very much.